

THE CHANGING PATTERN OF PĀÑCARĀTRA INITIATION:
A CASE STUDY IN THE REINTERPRETATION OF RITUAL

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While there is a discernible trend towards monotheism in late Vedic literature, it is the Mahābhārata that contains the earliest clear evidence of a monotheistic sect. The Nārāyaṇīya section (Mbh. 12, 321-339) presents a monotheistic Vaiṣṇavism, in which God, here called Nārāyaṇa, demands an exclusive (*ekānta*) devotion. God is at the same time the source and ground of the universe, like the older, Vedāntic, impersonal *brahman*, and the supreme person (*puruṣa*), object of adoration (*bhakti*). The best that can be done to date the Nārāyaṇīya is to observe that its theology is not very different from that of the Bhagavadgītā, which Gonda tentatively assigns to the second century B.C. (Gonda 1977:7).

The Nārāyaṇīya refers to the Pāñcarātra religion (*dharma*). The earliest extant Pāñcarātra scriptures cannot be accurately dated, but none is likely to be older than the fifth century A.D.. These early scriptures are in Sanskrit verse, which fact alone shows that they represent an attempt to Sanskritize their subject matter. The term 'Sanskritize' refers, of course, to more than language; it refers to an attempt to conform to the Brahminical norms of Hindu civilization. Brahmins are the guardians of the Veda, the sole source of religious authority, and of Sanskrit, the language of the Veda.

Originally Pāñcarātra was a Tantric sect. A sect is a chosen religion and membership is achieved by initiation (*dīkṣā*). It is typical of such Hindu sects that, at least in their first generations, membership was open to both sexes and all social classes.

This was true of early Pāñcarātra, and set it in stark contrast to Brahminism. Equally at variance with Brahminism was its soteriology: the aim of the initiate (as in all Tantric sects) was to realize his true identity with his (personal) God, to divinize himself through a combination of esoteric ritual and yogic meditation. At the same time - and this was typically Vaiṣṇava - this religious practice had to be permeated by devotion to God, who had it in his power to reward his devotees and punish the wicked.

The Pāñcarātra sect is still extant, though it has undergone great changes and indeed is better known under another name. Its highest grade of membership came to be restricted to the highest caste, and its esoteric and mystical character receded in favour of a more public ritualism on the one hand and a theology of self-surrender to God on the other. These developments culminated in the great theologian Rāmaṇuja (ca. 1100 A.D.), whose Vedāntic works on differentiated non-dualism (*viśiṣṭa advaita*) finally accommodated Pāñcarātra to Vedic orthodoxy. Since then, a Pāñcarātrin is known as a Śrī-Vaiṣṇava.

The Pāñcarātrin search for respectability, however, began long before Rāmaṇuja. Not only are the earliest extant scriptures in Sanskrit. Most of them are also called *saṃhitā*, a term borrowed from the Brahminical tradition, in which it refers to the Vedas. The anxious authors of these texts tried to camouflage their Tantric character by incorporating many such Vedic features. For instance, the Pāñcarātra rituals incorporate a host of Vedic *mantras*. The two most important of these are the Hymn on Puruṣa (RV. X, 90) and the Hymn on Śrī (RVKh. V, 87). Besides these, many other hymns and quotations from the Vedas, Brāhmanas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads and Dharma-sūtras¹ are utilized in the rites performed during public

religious feasts(*utsava*) and other religious observances (*vrata*). The most important borrowing from Vedism is the performance of the daily fire-sacrifice (*agnihotra*) in all Vaisnava temples.

On the other hand, as always happens in Hindu religions, the new tendency did not completely remove the earlier Tantric features of the Pāñcarātra system, but juxtaposed new to old in forming a synthesis. In this paper I want to examine one religious practice, a compulsory one, namely the initiation rites, by the authors of the Pāñcarātra scriptures. I have been inspired by Professor Hoens' own interest in the subject and by his writings on Tantric transmission. I hope in this way to show my deep respect for Professor Hoens and my admiration for his work.

Pāñcarātrin initiatory rites

Every follower of the Pāñcarātra sect must receive initiation. Like all features of the Pāñcarātra, its initiatory rites have been gradually vedicised. For example, the initiates are ceremoniously put on a vehicle (*ratha*) and taken to a tank or river and made to bathe (*avabhr̥ta snāna*). Then they pay their *guru* the usual honorarium (*dakṣiṇā*). This is an obvious copy of the Vedic rite of *samāvartanam*, which ends the period of religious discipleship and marks one's entry into the status of householder; the ritual bath, *avabhr̥ta snāna*, underscores the change of status.

However, just as the existing Pāñcarātra texts reveal a long progress towards a more exoteric style, thus leaving behind their esoteric origin, they still remain congruous with their sectarian origin in not very much changing the actual rites. Thus the rites remain much the same, only their significance comes to be forgotten.

For every Tantric sect, initiation is the method of transmitting the secret lore to the younger generation (Brunner-Lachaux 1977: Introduction). The initiate, through the rites of initiation, finds his identity in the sect, as a part of the long line of its teaching succession (*guru-paramparā*). The pupil starts by becoming a member of the religious community, which shares social, moral and religious values. This is a period of self-discipline and establishing one's bona fides for the application to enter into the centre of the community. The probationer must give firm proof of his loyalty to the tenets of the sect, his devotion to the Supreme God of the sect and to his or her cult, and of the integrity of his personal character. When such a pupil approaches his chosen spiritual guide (*guru*), the latter accepts him into the fold of the sect by giving him a preliminary initiation: the *guru* gives him a *mantra* and teaches him the outlines of the method of worship of and meditation on the presiding deity of the *mantra*. He also receives instruction from his *guru* in the theology and philosophy of his sect and cult - the beliefs which carry information about the rites. The Tantric term *samaya* denotes on the one hand all the communal, social, moral and religious rules and conventions and on the other theological and philosophical instruction. When the pupil now receives knowledge of these, he is called a *samayī*, the owner of *samaya*.

The *mantra*-initiation is for that general protection of the initiate which is sought in their religion by all members of the sect. The initiate is now

1. allowed to perform sectarian rites and thus properly worship his deity,
2. allowed, under the proper guidance of his *guru*, to study the sectarian theological and liturgical texts.

As a rule, this initiation is open to all castes and to both

sexes.

Medieval Hindu sectarian religious literature - the Āgamas, Samhitās and Tantras - has described a series of four successive initiations to the ascending statuses of *samayī*, *putraka* (little son), *sādhaka* (achiever) and *ācārya* (teacher). Each of these statuses is acquired after the initiations which are referred to as *samaya*, *putraka*, *sādhaka* and *ācārya* respectively. The titles indicate the status of the initiate in the sect, the stage of his spiritual progress and the nature of his aspiration. The successive initiations indeed constitute a selection procedure. One important thing to note about the *samayī* is that he is a faithful follower of the sect but has no authority.

Putraka, on the other hand, denotes acceptance within the family (*kula*), the inner circle of the sect which contains present and future priests and teachers. Not every member of the sect is deemed capable of becoming a custodian of its secret lore. Each sect has its own criteria for selection, in which factors like caste, personal character, intelligence and aspirations all play a role. In some Pāñcarātra texts like the Jayākhyā Samhitā (XVI, 61) women-*samayī* form a separate group which has no place within the *putraka-sādhaka-ācārya* structure. The probationers may have to wait long before they are eventually selected.

The initiation ceremony of a *putraka* is very elaborate, consisting of many rites². It requires the construction of a special ceremonial platform on which the initiatory rites are held. A special mystical diagram (*mandala*) is drawn in which the initiates are ritually given a new name. Besides ordinary purificatory acts the initiates are required to sleep on the platform the previous night by the side of a pitcher which is full of water into which the deity has been ritually invoked. The *guru* himself spends the night by the side of the initiates. This complex ritual is called *adhivāsa* or "living under" (divine

presence).

The *putraka* learns the meaning of his *mantra*. The *guru* reveals to him various methods for performing worship and meditating on the *mantra* together with an explanation of its significance. He teaches the pupils the practical aspects of rituals as well as their secret meanings. He also teaches them how to analyse a *mantra* into its seminal form (*bīja*), its concrete form (*pinda*), its components (*pada*) and its six parts or limbs (*aṅga*), and finally its essential power (*vīrya*). The *putraka* thus learns all components of the Tantric religious practice, *sādhana*, which contains two parts: ritual worship of the *mantra* and its deity, and meditation on the deity and one's own self as identified with the deity. The ritual acts are never independent of the contemplative meditation and are considered to be preparatory to the ensuing deep meditation on the deity (Gupta-Hoens-Goudriaan 1979: 121-164). *Sādhana* is an important term in Tantric *yoga*. It distinguishes the Tantric practices from the yogic practices of the Upaniṣadic or Vedāntic tradition of the *sannyāsins* or world-renouncers. Unlike the Vedāntic *sannyāsī yogins*, the Tantric *yogins* aim at both personal gain (*bhukti*), i.e. possessing occult powers (*mantrasiddhi*) and salvation (*mukti*), i.e. release from the bondage of transient life (*samsāra*) by transcending life. In both cases, the Tantric *yogin* must achieve, in the true sense of the word, total identity with the Supreme God, who is the unique transcendental reality.

Initiation as a *sādhaka* takes place when one has become an adept at *tantrayoga* and intends to use that proficiency for *bhukti*. The *sādhaka* needs the sanction (*adhikāra*) of his *guru* for his quest. He is engrossed in his practice of worship (*pūjā*), the first component of *tantra-sādhana*, and in meditative contemplation.

Being an aspirant, he seeks for successive forms of occult

power and perfection (*siddhi*) and thus remains limited by his own desires, although these are of supramundane nature. This shows that he has not yet reached *mukti*, the spiritual state in which the *yogin* is merged within the Supreme Divine. The realization that the universe, both mundane and occult, exists within oneself removes the egoistic feeling of isolation and self-limitation - the feeling which is the cause of all desire - and so makes any endeavour for occult power superfluous.

But the sect also has to ensure its own continuity. For that purpose, adepts must be found who will not devote all their time in the pursuit of individual goals, who will agree to act as spiritual guides and teachers. It is such a person who is selected from the advanced *putrakas* or even from *sādhakas* to become an *ācārya*. The *ācārya* initiation is conferred on them³.

Both the *sādhaka* initiation and the *ācārya* initiation include a rite of consecration (*abhiṣeka*), without which Tantrics believe *mukti* to be impossible. *Abhiṣeka* also is a rite of confirmation of the initiate's position of authority.

This brief survey of the Tantric pattern of the four initiations shows that whereas the step from *samayī* to *putraka* is a simple progression, there is then a parting of the ways. No clear hierarchy exists between the last two initiations (Tantrāloka XXIII, 2; Brunner-Lachaux 1975). In both cases, the candidates are selected mainly from the advanced *putrakas* - i.e. ritualists and *yogins* - on the basis of competence, intelligence and suitability of character.

This does not mean that one cannot have, in succession, both the initiations of the *sādhaka* and the *ācārya*. The *sādhaka* initiation must in that case precede the *ācārya* initiation. But neither in their spiritual development nor in their status in the sect does there exist a ranking between the two. The

difference lies in their respective attitudes towards life.

The development of the initiations in the Pāñcarātra scriptures

How did this common Tantric structure develop in Pāñcarātra? We begin by classifying the Pāñcarātra scriptures (Gonda 1977: 57-80; Schrader 1916: 1-6; Smith 1975). They can be differentiated according to whether they deal mainly with *yoga* or with various types of private and public (temple) rituals. Three texts fall into the first category viz. the Sāttvata Samhitā, which can be used as a primary source of information the Ahirbudhnya Samhitā and the Lakṣmī Tantra. The last two can be used then to confirm the first. Three other texts which fall into the second category, viz. the Jayākhya Samhitā, the Pauṣkara Samhitā and the Śrīpraśna Samhitā can then be examined. Of these six, traditionally the SS., PS. and JS. are considered to be the oldest Pāñcarātra texts (Schrader 1916: 29-59; Gupta 1972: XXVIII-XXIX; Gonda 1977: 60-62). What I propose to show in this paper is that in their eagerness to become exoteric (public) and respectable (Vedic), the authors of the Pāñcarātra scriptures gradually lost sight of the distinctive character of a *yogin/sādhaka* and confused him with a practitioner of the *putraka* type - a disciple of the secret lore who is not yet an adept. This confusion then led them to consider the four initiations as a simple progress up a hierarchy.

I begin with the SS., a text dealing mainly with the Pāñcarātra yogic system. It obviously was the model for the AS. and LT. This text describes four types of initiation and a concluding consecratory ceremony of bathing (*abhiṣeka*) the initiate with consecrated water. The first initiation is called *vaibhavīya nārasimhī*. Then come the three hierarchically progressive initiations called material (*sthūla*), subtle (*sūkṣ-*

ma) and transcendental or supreme (*para*). These terms relate to Pāñcarātra theology and cosmology (LT. XIX). The supreme reality is the transcendental God Nārāyaṇa, who in his pristine state is totally immutable, one integral Reality. Nothing can be predicated of him. In order to circumvent the problem of how to connect him with all attributes and acts which are associated with the creator and saviour sovereign God, Tantric theology developed the concept of *śakti*, a term which means simultaneously power, potency and potentiality. *Sakti* is God's essential nature, his personality or "I-ness" (*ahantā*). *Sakti* is thus a hypostatization, a concretization of God's personality and activity. In Pāñcarātra her personified form is called Lakṣmī and she is said in mythological texts to be God's wife. In this way, every divine manifestation is indeed a manifestation of Lakṣmī. In her primal form, Lakṣmī represents God's consciousness and thought (*samvit*). This is also equated with ideal speech in its unmanifested form (LT. II, 6-12), and is called *parā vāc*. *Sakti* is the fountainhead of all creation, which evolves by stages.

God's, i.e. Lakṣmī's, primary manifestation is characterized by six divine qualities (*sāḍgunya*): *jñāna* (knowledge), *aiśvarya* (sovereignty), *śakti* (potency and potentiality), *bala* (strength), *vīrya* (energy) and *tejas* (splendour and might). Collectively they are called *kalā* and constitute the divine form of Lakṣmī. This is still a transcendental (*para*) emanation of God and is called *para Vāsudeva*, the supreme Vāsudeva.

The next stage of creation is called the *vyūha* (diversified) stage and contains the *vyūha* deities - *vyūha Vāsudeva*, *Samkarsaṇa*, *Pradyumna* and *Aniruddha*. The *vyūha* deities are God's subtle emanations.

From *Aniruddha* emanate the material or empirical world and also all other divinities of the Pāñcarātra Vaiṣṇava cult. Each of these divinities is a direct manifestation of God but

in a limited aspect. Each reveals only one aspect of the divine power and sovereignty. Hence they are called *vibhava* deities (the term meaning sovereign and omnipresent). Each of these deities, like the rest of the creation, has an audible (*śabda*) form and a visible form used in iconography. The former is called the deity's *mantra* form. The sole reason for the existence of the *vibhava* deities is to make the Supreme Divine accessible to his devotees (SS. II, 38; Carman 1974: 173-5).

The SS. classification of initiation as material, subtle and transcendental merely refers to the fact that the initiate at each initiation is given a *mantra* belonging to the corresponding category of deities: *vibhava*, *vyūha* and *para*⁴.

The first initiation, *vaibhavīya nārasimhī*, is so named because the initiate is given the *Nārasimha mantra*, the audible form of the *Narasimha* (man-lion) *avatāra* of *Nārāyaṇa*, who signifies God's sovereign irresistible power. According to the SS., when a devotee, world-weary and repentant, becomes full of love for God and ready to throw himself unconditionally onto God's mercy and is full of faith in God's power and desire to save, he approaches a *guru* of the sect, seeking admission into its fold. The *guru* subjects him to a long and penetrating test of his sincerity, capacity and natural mental propensity. After a while the *guru* again interviews the person and takes an inventory of the state of his *karma*. The *guru* then arranges expiatory rites for the initiate, mild or severe according to the nature and extent of his evil *karma*. But it is also said that true love for and dedication to God redeem even the heaviest burden of evil *karma*. The candidates then undergo the usual physical purification of shaving off all the hair, cutting finger- and toenails and bathing and wearing new clothes. For a short period, a special cleansing with the water of the *brahmakūṛca* jug may also be prescribed for them. This is a jug of specially consecrated water with a bunch of

sacred grass stuck into it. The initiates must sprinkle themselves and drink some of this water several times a day. Then the *guru* worships his deity and in meditation envisages the purification of the initiates' empirical body by gradually reducing it by following in reverse the steps of creation to its essence (*bhūtaśuddhi*) (Gupta-Hoens-Goudriaan 1979: 136-7). Then again in meditation the *guru* envisages the rebirth of the initiates who are now pure and consubstantial with *śakti*, their essence. This meditative process is called *laya-yoga*, the *yoga* of dissolution. Now the pupils receive the *Nārasimha-mantra* or any other important *vibhava-mantra* and are taught how to perform all the rites involved in its proper worship. It is noticeable that the initiates are not given a new name and the effect of *laya-yoga* is only temporary. Thus no rebirth of the neophyte is indicated. The main purpose of the initiation, says SS., is to protect the neophytes and remove their sins. Although both SS. and AS. make it clear that a prolonged practice of *Tantra-yoga* with the *Nārasimha-mantra* indeed leads to the highest form of *bhukti*⁵ and to *mukti*, that is not within the reach of the neophytes immediately after their first initiation.

The *guru* keeps an alert eye on these pupils during his teaching sessions in order to make an individual assessment of each one of them. Then he selects a few of them to receive the second initiation, the "material" initiation. This is a very elaborate ceremony. A special platform is built after elaborate consecration of the site as a venue for the initiatory rites. On one part of it, a religious cosmogonic diagram (*mandala*) is drawn. The *guru* elaborately worships his deity and then prepares a big waterpot filled with consecrated water. The disciples to be are physically cleaned (as before) and then brought inside the enclosed section of the platform where the waterpot is kept. The *guru* performs *laya-yoga* for them

and they spend the night there, sleeping close to the waterpot. The *guru* too sleeps there with them, but he wakes up very early in the morning before the others and again worships his deity to renew his total identity with the deity. Thus, ritually apotheosized, he wakes up the others and interrogates them about their dreams. If the dreams reveal bad omens, the *guru* performs some expiatory rites. Otherwise, he leads the pupils blindfolded to the *mandala* for the rite of naming. This rite, to a limited degree, leaves the choice of a Vaiṣṇava name for the novice to chance.

In the next rite the *guru* measures each candidate's body, from head to foot, with a piece of cord (*māyāsūtra*) made of three strands. He then puts on each cord as many knots as there are ontological realities (*tattvas*) postulated by Pāñcarātra philosophy. The *guru* now, through his yogic power, enters the heart of each candidate and establishes there the *mantra* to be given to him, after having extracted the *mantra* from his own heart. Thus the *guru* establishes the primary rapport between the disciple and his chosen *mantra* and its deity.

Finally, the *guru* together with each disciple performs a fire-sacrifice called *sampāta-homa*, wherein each knot of the *māyāsūtra* is individually sacrificed following the order of involution (i.e. retracing the Pāñcarātra cosmogonic steps) back into the primal *śakti*. Thus his impure body is destroyed for ever by a mental effort. He is reborn directly from the divine source, *śakti*, and is consubstantial with *śakti*. His blindfold is now removed and the *guru*, being identified with God, looks at the neophyte and touches him with his blessed hand (SS. XIX, 124 ff.).

The *mantra* given to the candidates is a comprehensive one, giving them the right to use any *mantra* of the *vibhava* group. This comprehensive (*vyāpaka*) *mantra* is that of *Viśākha-yūpa*, which represents all *vibhava* deities and is iconographically

shown as a cosmic column (Gupta 1971: 159).

After this "material" initiation, which is equivalent to the *putraka* initiation (SS. XIX, 168), the initiates receive a thorough teaching in the *sādhana* of the sect. The *guru* teaches them the concept of creation, which is an evolutionary process in six stages through which God emanates the world (*sādhvan*). These are called paths because the *yogin* in his spiritual journey must pass through each of them, starting from the sensual world. First he must identify himself with each stage and then disentangle himself and proceed to the next, until he reaches the highest, the state called Speech or Sound. From there he automatically passes to the transcendental immutable state of Reality.

Besides these teachings in philosophy and *yoga*, the pupils are also taken at this stage to temples and trained in methods of temple worship.

The *vyūha* and *para* initiations follow the same pattern of rites, only the *mantras* are changed to the appropriate categories. But the text adds that though these two initiations produce a permanent result, i.e. salvation, yet such is the inherent power of the *vyūha-mantras* that they even produce unsolicited prosperity (*bhukti*).

The *sādhaka's bhukti* consists of attaining the six divine qualities (*sāḍgunya*) and the marks of the divine personality, whereas the *vibhava-mantras* produce only *bhoga* - wordly prosperity. *Para* initiation (also called Brahma initiation), on the other hand, brings about nothing but a total merging (*vilaya*) into the transcendental Reality, God. Therefore, *vyūha* and *para* initiations mark only the spiritual progress of the *sādhaka*, though SS. is not explicit about it. This is also apparent from the two different teachings which the *guru* imparts to the pupils after their *putraka* initiation, viz. yogic and ritualistic. They are left free to choose whether to

try to be good ritualists and theoreticians by following all ritual applications of the *vibhava-mantras*, or to continue the intensive practice of Pāncarātra yogic *sādhana* with the aid of higher and subtler *mantras*, and become adepts in *mantras*.

The text remains silent about the details of the *sādhaka* and the *ācārya* initiations. So it can be assumed that the *vyūha* and *para* initiations are meant for the *ācārya* too. On the other hand, SS. clearly says that the *putraka* who aspires to follow *yoga* and *mantra-siddhi* leading to prosperity (*bhukti*) and the *putraka* who aspires to erudition and skill which ultimately lead to his becoming an *ācārya*, the transmitter of the sectarian religion, are both seeking for special privileges in the sect (*adhikāra*). Only their *guru* can give these privileges by consecrating them by means of an *abhiśeka* ceremony (Gupta-Hoens-Goudriaan 1979: 88). Both *sādhaka* and *ācārya* receive *pūrṇābhiśeka*, a term which implies that they receive such permission unconditionally.

The following chart will make the SS. position clear: there is no difference between a *sādhaka* and an *ācārya* in their sectarian status; only their areas of privilege and authority are different.

Status	Name of initiation	Important purificatory rites	mantra	Special rites suggesting rebirth	Rite to achieve authority
<i>samyaḥ</i>	<i>vaibhaviṭya</i> <i>nārasimhṭ</i>	<i>brahmakūroa</i> and <i>layayoga</i>	Nārasimha- mantra or any one of the <i>vibha- va-mantras</i>		
<i>putraka</i>	material or <i>vibhava</i> -ini- tiation	comprehensive <i>vibhava</i> -mantra	<i>layayoga</i> and <i>sampāta</i> <i>homa</i>	<i>adhivāsa</i> and naming rites	
<i>sādhaka</i>	subtle or <i>vyūha</i> and transcenden- tal or <i>para</i> -ini- tiations	<i>vyūha</i> - and <i>para</i> -mantras			<i>abhiśeka</i> , permitted to pursue <i>siddhi</i>
<i>ācārya</i>	subtle or <i>vyūha</i> and transcenden- tal or <i>para</i> -ini- tiations	<i>vyūha</i> - and <i>para</i> -mantras			<i>abhiśeka</i> , permitted to initiate and give spiritual guidance to others

The AS. and LT. preserve the *yoga* tradition of Pāñcarātra. There is no doubt that their model was the SS. But, in their description of the initiatory rites, no distinction reveals the exact nature of the initiation. AS. is very brief in its description, but LT. is not. Nevertheless, both texts justify the assumption that they describe a combined form of the *putraka* and the *sādhaka* initiations.

Alaśiṅga Bhaṭṭa, the very learned eighteenth century commentator on the SS., has a very long discussion (SS. XIX, and X and its commentary) on the classification of Pāñcarātra initiations. He quotes profusely from different texts and finally concludes that there is a clear hierarchical progression through these four initiations. Reflecting the convention of his time, he tried to make a synthesis between the two disparate descriptions of the *abhiṣeka* ceremony in SS. and in JS.

The description of the initiatory rites in JS. is long and complex but perfectly schematized. Initiations are divided into two broad classes: general (*sāmānya*) and particular (*viśeṣa*). The former is sub-divided under three headings:

1. initiation with *mantra* alone,
2. initiation with *mantra*, *tattva* (ontological reality) and *bīja* (*mantra* in its seminal form),
3. initiation with *mantra*, *dhyāna* (meditation) and *homa* (fire-sacrifice).

The *viśeṣa* class of initiations is sub-divided under five headings:

1. *samayī*,
2. *putraka*,
3. *sādhaka* and those who want *mukti* (salvation),
4. *ācārya* who wants to merge in Brahman,
5. women.

I shall only discuss the second class of initiations. (The initiation of women is not discussed in the text at all). The

rites do not greatly differ from those described in the SS. What is remarkable in the JS. is that although it refers to the seekers of prosperity (*bhukti*) as well as to the seekers of salvation (*mukti*), it connects *bhukti* with the first two types of initiates, *samayī* and *putraka*, and *mukti* with the last two. Moreover, according to the JS. each of the four categories of initiates receives *abhiṣeka*, but also there exists a progress of authorization through all four rites. This is made clear by a series of parallels: the *samayī* is considered to be a general (*senāpati*); the *putraka* is like a prime minister; the *sādhaka* is like a crown prince, and the *ācārya* is like a king⁶. There is a distinct impression that the JS. regards the four categories of initiations as evenly-graded, progressive stages in the acquisition of rights and skills to perform Pāñcarātra ritual. The *putraka* receives the five special Pāñcarātra sacraments (*pancasamskāra*):

1. the branding of Vaiṣṇava marks,
2. learning to put on religious marks, drawn with special ointments on twelve parts of the body,
3. getting a new name,
4. receiving the secret *mantra*,
5. being instructed in Vaiṣṇava forms of worship and fire-sacrifice (*yāga*)⁷.

The *sādhaka* is initiated with a special sacrifice for salvation (*nirvāṇa*) and then receives permission to follow the Pāñcarātra *sādhana* in a quiet and solitary place. Here, the *ācārya* initiation is said to be the natural development of a *sādhaka*. But only after this initiation is he permitted to initiate others. Otherwise the rites are identical with those performed during the *sādhaka* initiation.

The Pauskara Samhitā, another ancient text on temple rituals, does not throw any more light on the four types of initiation.

It only describes a different ritual diagram (*mandala*) for each initiation. From the nature of those diagrams and their deities, one can deduce that a progressive complexity of ritual skill and handling of *mantras* is to be expected from the respective initiates of these four initiations. Thus PS. too tacitly accepts the theory that these four initiations constitute a hierarchy.

The final development of Pāñcarātra religion, including its pattern of initiation, can be seen in the *Srīpraśna Samhitā*, which is a very late text. It explains the term *dikṣā* (initiation) as consisting of two verbal roots: *dya-* to destroy, and *īkṣ-* to see. The former refers to the severance of all earthly bonds and the latter refers to seeing Viṣṇu's highest abode (SpS. XVI, 18-20). Initiation alone is enough to remove all worldly fetters and produce salvation (*mukti*), which is identical to seeing Viṣṇu's abode. SpS. declares further that, as in the Vedic *karma-kāṇḍa* (exegesis on ritual), an initiation is required to enable one to perform Vedic sacrifice. Likewise, in the Ekāyana (i.e. Pāñcarātra)⁸ scripture, initiation is necessary for performing *pūjā* (worship) and *homa* (fire-sacrifice). It says that every constituent factor of the initiation ceremony is a manifestation of Viṣṇu; and by undergoing it, the initiate becomes united with him. Since the initiation itself is now said to be a manifestation of Viṣṇu, there is nothing left for the initiate to do. His achievement (*siddhi*) of identification with God is complete, so he cannot be an "achiever" (*sādhaka*). Instead, he is a surrenderer-of-the-self (*prapanna*), whose sole task is God's service (*sevā*). The service is the ritual which the text propounds.

According to SpS. initiations are of three types: material, subtle and transcendental. But it acknowledges another system of classification too: the four initiations *samaya* etc. The following chart makes the SpS. account of initiations clear.

Status	Name of initiation	Important rites	Special rites	Rite to achieve authority
<i>samāyī</i>	material initiation	allowed to perform Vedic rites and Pāncarātra rites for himself	receives five Pāncarātra sacraments	the initiation is described as <i>mānasī</i> (mental)
<i>putraka</i>	subtle initiation	learns how to perform public/temple <i>pūjā</i>		
<i>sādhaka</i>		allowed to officiate at Pāncarātra festivals		receives <i>abhiśeka</i>
<i>ācārya</i> (1) belonging to Tantra and Tantrāra tradition of Pāncarātra		as with <i>sādhaka</i> ; also allowed to officiate at temple/public worship		the initiation is described as "seedless" (<i>nir-bīja</i>); he receives <i>abhiśeka</i>
<i>ācārya</i> (2) belonging to Āgama and Mantrāra tradition of Pāncarātra	transcendental initiation	as with <i>ācārya</i> 1		the initiation is called "with seed" (<i>sabīja</i>) and he receives <i>abhiśeka</i>

The initiation of the *ācārya* (2) is called *sabīja* ("with seed") because, in this ceremony, only Vedic and Ekayana (Pāñcarātra) *mantras* are used. Perhaps the idea is that only an initiation with these *mantras* can bring about salvation and hence is fruitful.

However, the chart shows that there is no clear distinction between the first two initiations except for the degree of knowledge of sectarian religious acts. The connection between the *sādhaka* and Pāñcarātra *yoga* has been forgotten and the *sādhaka* is little more than a ritualist with more than average skills. The *ācārya* is one who has completed his training in ritual and is a fully-fledged priest (SpS. XVI, 144 ff.).

Conclusion

In short: all the early Pāñcarātra texts still recognize the importance of the *putraka* initiation. The SS. emphatically states that at that particular stage the *guru* should carefully evaluate the initiates and choose a *mantra* of greater or lesser power with which to initiate the candidate: i.e. in accordance with his personal aim, capacity and character.

In the general spirit of Vaiṣṇavism, the SS. emphasizes the goal of salvation and its pursuit through renunciation (*vairāgya*). Nevertheless, it still retains the typical Tantric view that religious practice (*sādhana*) also leads to worldly benefits (*bhoga*) and occult power (*siddhi*). It does not commend these results but says that they follow automatically from yogic practice. An ordinary disciple (*putraka*) only achieves worldly prosperity, not occult power. Only an adept (*sādhaka*) has the mental and spiritual calibre to attain *siddhi* as well as *mukti*. There is nothing to prevent someone from becoming first a *sādhaka* and then an *ācārya*. But an *ācārya* is expected to show ritual skill and erudition in theology

together with human sympathy and understanding (SS. XX, 18-61) - qualities hardly to be expected from a lonely *yogin* with purely private goals.

As Pāñcarātra became oriented to public worship in temples, changes became necessary. The old Tantric elements were gradually suppressed to such a degree that the class of adepts in Tantra-*yoga* who must have given the sect its original *raison d'être* became obsolete. In order to dissociate themselves from the occult atmosphere of magic which pervades the most ancient Tantras, even the earliest surviving Pāñcarātra texts like SS. and JS. idealize the goal of salvation at the expense of the goal of empirical and occult power and prosperity. Even the *sādhaka*, the *yogin*, is required to make *mukti* his main aim. *Bhukti* comes to him incidentally, i.e. as a by-product of the power of his *mantra*. Similarly, non-attachment and renunciation are constantly stressed. The JS., which emphasizes ritual and non-esoteric temple worship, plays down the status of the *yogin* to such an extent that it lacks any description of the yogic path. The JS.'s presentation of the *sādhaka* even suggests that this is only a stage on the way to becoming an *ācārya*. Whether or not the original author of the JS. knew better and was consciously promoting religious change towards respectability and Vedic orthodoxy, it can be seen that, by the time of the SpS., the meaning of the *sādhaka* and his initiation had been completely forgotten. SS. is the only text that clearly enumerates and sticks to the ancient scheme of the four Tantric initiations, in which the *yogin* occupied an important position. But its influence was limited. The *sādhakas* slowly disappeared from the sect and there emerged a linear pattern in the four Tantric initiations, *samaya* and the others, conflating with the three gradations of the yogic practitioners and adepts, viz. the material, the subtle and the transcendental initiates. Finally, the new *bhakti* ideology of self-surrender (*prapatti*) made the

very idea of what the *sādhaka* was originally supposed to do heretical, for man could no longer aspire to become identical with God.

Notes

1. Cf. *Srīpraśna Samhitā*, Introduction, pp. lviii-lxiv.
2. Cf. *Abhinavagupta*, *Tantrāloka*, XVI-XVII.
3. The difference between a *sādhaka* (adept) and an *ācārya* (learned preceptor) is vividly pictured in Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhavam* (translated by Michael Coulson, Three Sanskrit Plays, Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1981). Two very important characters, drawn from the world of Buddhist Tantrism, are Kāmandakī, a Buddhist Tantric woman *ācārya*, and Saudāminī, her disciple, an adept (*sādhaka*). While the former, highly venerated, lady shows a deep and sympathetic understanding of human nature and a strong sense of social ethics, even though her values are rather pragmatic, she never acts in any occult way. On the other hand, the latter, though a disciple of Kāmandakī, shows extraordinary occult powers and triumphs over the Śaiva-Tantric savants by undoing their spells.
4. It is to be noted that although in the Pāñcarātra system several categories of the first group of deities are recognised, such as *avatāra devatās*, *arcā* (images) etc., as far as the initiation ceremonies are concerned, they all belong to the category of materially or empirically manifest, either as images or as *avatāras* (incarnations).
5. *Bhukti* and occult power can be classified in various categories according to the nature of the results obtained, such as *śānti* (peace), *pustī* (prosperity), *āpyāyana* (increase of fortune), *rakṣā* (protection), etc.
6. JS. XVIII, 34-35. The author of the JS. does not comment on the fifth category of initiates, viz. the women. No other

text treats them as a separate category. The LT. maintains that they can be given *śamayī*, *putraka* and *sādhaka* initiations.

7. ŚpS. XVI, 109: *tāpaḥ puṇḍras tathā nāma mantrō yāgaśca pañcamah.*
8. *Ekāyana* means "the only way" and the authors of the Pāñcarātra texts call their scriptures *ekāyana* because they believe this to be the only way to salvation. See Gonda 1977: 42.

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